

Workbook On Colossians



The Tell of Colosse

“Be careful not to allow anyone to captivate you through an empty, deceitful philosophy that is according to human traditions and the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. For in him all the fullness of deity lives in bodily form...” (Colossians 2:8–10, NET)

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Introduction To Colossians

Colossians is perhaps the most Christ-centered book in the Bible. In it Paul stresses the preeminence of the Person of Christ and the completeness of the salvation He provides.

Date

Paul wrote this epistle from prison, as he did Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon. Although Caesarea and Ephesus have been suggested as possible locations of authorship, the bulk of evidence suggests that Paul wrote it in A.D. 60 or 61 during his first Roman imprisonment (Acts 28:16–31) and sent it with Tychicus and the converted slave Onesimus to Colosse (4:7–9; cf. Eph 6:21; Philem. 10–12).

Colosse was a minor city about one hundred miles east of Ephesus in the region of the seven Asian churches of Revelation 1–3. Located in the fertile Lycus Valley on the road from Ephesus to the east, Colosse had previously been a populous center of commerce, but by the time of Paul it had been eclipsed in importance by the neighboring cities of Laodicea and Hierapolis. Apart from this letter, Colosse exerted almost no influence on early church history.

The precise character of the Colossian heresy has been a matter of debate. The nature of this heresy can only be deduced from Paul's incidental references to it in his refutation in 2:8–23. It was apparently a religious system that combined elements from Hellenistic Greek speculation (2:4, 8–10), Jewish legalism (2:11–17), and Oriental mysticism (2:18–23). It involved a low view of the body (2:20–23) and probably of nature as a whole. With its stress upon the importance of circumcision, dietary regulations, and ritual observances, together with its worship of angels and preoccupation with mystical experiences, the Colossian heresy denied the sufficiency of Christ, and any attempt to fit Christ into such a system would undermine His Person and redemptive work.

Themes and Literary Structure

The resounding theme in Colossians is the preeminence and sufficiency of Christ in all things. The believer is complete in Him alone and lacks nothing because "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (2:9). The first part of the epistle is an exposition of Christ's supremacy (chs. 1–2); the second part explains the implications of Christ's supremacy in terms of the believer's submission to Christ the Lord (chs. 3–4).

Particularly in the second half of the epistle, Paul explores the implications of the believer's union with Christ. The believer's union with Christ in His death, resurrection and exaltation is the foundation upon which earthly life must be built (3:1–4). Because of their death with Christ, Christians must regard themselves as dead to the old way of sin (3:5–11); because of their resurrection with Christ, believers must regard themselves as alive to Him in righteousness and must put on the new qualities that are prompted by Christian love (3:12–17).

The new life in Christ is to be manifested in the personal relationships of the Christian. Paul provides specific instructions for husbands and wives, children, servants, and masters (3:18–4:1).

Ephesians and Colossians Compared

Though written at approximately the same time and reflecting similar themes, the books of Ephesians and Colossians have their own distinctive emphases. If the book of Ephesians can be labeled the epistle portraying the "Church of Christ," then the focus of Colossians must surely be the "Christ of the Church."

Christ Above All

The apostle does not directly argue with the Colossians about their false doctrines. Rather, beginning in the first chapter, he builds a positive case for Christian truth by showing the preeminence of Christ in everything.

Focusing on Christ

The first two chapters of Colossians constitute one of the great Christological passages in Scripture. In stressing the role of the Son as Creator and Redeemer, and in his recognition that "in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (2:9), Paul affirms the full deity of Christ.

A Singing Faith

As is evident in the Old Testament, the Hebrew faith emphasized the joy of singing to the Lord, but Christianity is even more profoundly a singing faith. Singing can help to make teaching and preaching even more useful. The Colossians were to emphasize the ministry of teaching and admonition by the singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. (*Nelson's Complete Book of Bible Maps And Charts*, pp. 416–418)

The City Of Colossae

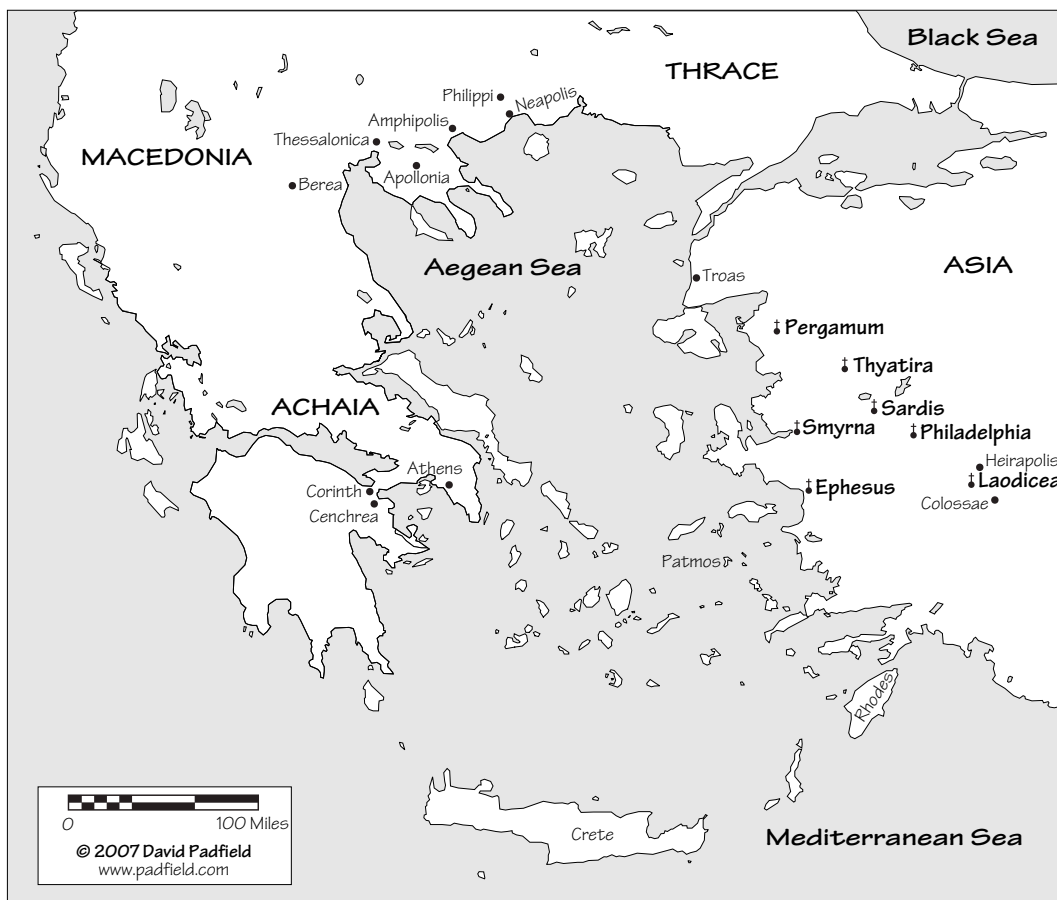
Colossae lies about a mile below the present village of Honaz on the north slope of Honaz Dagi and about 18 km east of Denizli. Of the sites described in this book it is one of the least rewarding to a casual tourist, but a walk from Honaz to it might give a hint of rural Anatolia as Paul experienced it. Its place in Christian history is because of a 1st century AD letter addressed to it that was included in the New Testament.

In the 5th century BC Colossae was a major commercial center on the trade route from Sardis to Konya. It lost its importance by the 1st century BC when Laodicea was founded. It, along with Laodicea and Hierapolis, was destroyed in the earthquake of AD 60. The cities of the area declined in the 7th and 8th centuries AD under the pressure of Arab invaders. Later the Byzantines and Selçuks fought over it. The remains of a theater are still discernible, along with a few other buildings; but the site has not been excavated and is rarely visited. Colossae was famous for the dark red wool cloth that carried its name, *colossinum*.

The Letter to the Colossians, attributed to Paul,

was probably written about AD 60 or 65. The grammar and the vocabulary of the letter have called into question Paul's authorship. However, it could be that he asked one of his companions to put his thoughts into words and then gave his mark of approval by adding a note at the end in his own hand. From various references in the letter, it would appear that some of the Christians in Colossae were Jews (Col. 2:11, 16, 21); and that Paul had not visited the city (Col. 1:4; 2:3). Rather, he had heard about the group from Epaphras and from Onesimus who apparently was from Colossae (Col. 4:9). Paul was in prison at the time (Col. 4:3), possibly in Rome. It also appears that Paul had become reconciled with John Mark (Col. 4:10) after their disagreement in Perge some years before. Others mentioned in this letter include Timothy (whom Paul had met in Lystra), Luke (thought to be the author of Acts which details many of Paul's journeys), Aristarchus who was in prison with him, and Tychicus whom Paul had asked to carry the letter. Paul also made reference in the letter to the Christian community in Laodicea.

(Anna Edmonds, *Turkey's Religious Sites*, pp. 134–135)



Colossians 1:1–8



1 From Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, 2 to the saints, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ, at Colossae. Grace and peace to you from God our Father! 3 We always give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, 4 since we heard about your faith in Christ Jesus and the love that you have for all the saints. 5 Your faith and love have arisen from the hope laid up for you in heaven, which you have heard about in the message of truth, the gospel 6 that has come to you. Just as in the entire world this gospel is bearing fruit and growing, so it has also been bearing fruit and growing among you from the first day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth. 7 You learned the gospel from Epaphras, our dear fellow slave—a faithful minister of Christ on our behalf— 8 who also told us of your love in the Spirit.

Introduction

1. Who is Timothy? Why is he mentioned in this letter?
2. What makes one a *faithful brother* in Christ?
3. Why did Paul give thanks to God for the brethren at Colosse?
4. How do we express our love for the saints?
5. What is our *hope* which is laid up in heaven? Is it more than heaven itself? Please explain.
6. By the time Paul wrote this epistle, how far had the gospel gone outside of the city of Jerusalem? Why is this so incredible?
7. What is the difference between *hearing* and *knowing* the grace of God?
8. Who is Epaphras? What do we know about him?

“All true Christians are brethren one to another. Faithfulness runs through every character and relation of the Christian life. Faith, hope, and love, are the three principal graces in the Christian life, and proper matter for prayer and thanksgiving. The more we fix our hopes on the reward in the other world, the more free shall we be in doing good with our earthly treasure. It was treasured up for them, no enemy could deprive them of it. The gospel is the word of truth, and we may safely venture our souls upon it. And all who hear the word of the gospel, ought to bring forth the fruit of the gospel, obey it, and have their principles and lives formed according to it. Worldly love arises, either from views of interest or from likeness in manners; carnal love, from the appetite for pleasure. To these, something corrupt, selfish, and base always cleaves. But Christian love arises from the Holy Spirit, and is full of holiness.” (Matthew Henry)

Colossians 1:9–18



9 For this reason we also, from the day we heard about you, have not ceased praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you may live worthily of the Lord and please him in all respects—bearing fruit in every good deed, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might for the display of all patience and steadfastness, joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father who has qualified you to share in the saints’ inheritance in the light. 13 He delivered us from the power of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, 16 for all things in heaven and on earth were created by him—all things, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or dominions, whether principalities or powers—all things were created through him and for him. 17 He himself is before all things and all things are held together in him. 18 He is the head of the body, the church, as well as the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead, so that he himself may become first in all things.



The Preeminence Of Christ

1. Why did Paul continually pray for the brethren in Colosse? What was he asking God for?
2. What does it mean to “live worthily of the Lord”?
3. What is “the display of all patience and steadfastness”?
4. How has God *qualified* us to share in the inheritance of the saints?
5. What is the “power of darkness”?
6. In this context, what is “the kingdom of the Son he loves”?
7. What is *redemption*? Why is this word so fitting to describe our salvation from past sins?
8. How is Christ “the image of the invisible God”?
9. Who created the universe? Is this in harmony with the book of Genesis?
10. How is Christ “first in all things”?



19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in the Son
20 and through him to reconcile all things to himself by making peace through the blood of his cross—through him, whether things on earth or things in heaven. 21 And you were at one time strangers and enemies in your minds as expressed through your evil deeds, 22 but now he has reconciled you by his physical body through death to present you holy, without blemish, and blameless before him— 23 if indeed you remain in the faith, established and firm, without shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard. This gospel has also been preached in all creation under heaven, and I, Paul, have become its servant. 24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for you, and I fill up in my physical body—for the sake of his body, the church—what is lacking in the sufferings of Christ. 25 I became a servant of the church according to the stewardship from God—given to me for you—in order to complete the word of God, 26 that is, the mystery that has been kept hidden from ages and generations, but has now been revealed to his saints. 27 God wanted to make known to them the glorious riches of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 We proclaim him by instructing and teaching all people with all wisdom so that we may present every person mature in Christ. 29 Toward this goal I also labor, struggling according to his power that powerfully works in me.

Reconciliation And Service

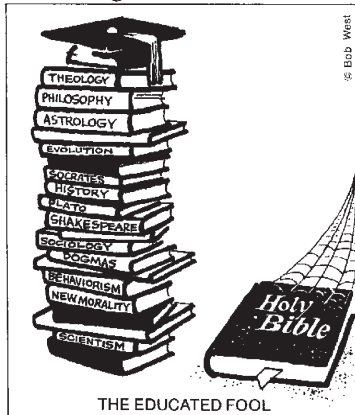
1. How does God's *fullness* dwell in Christ? Please explain.
2. How did God "reconcile all things to himself" through Christ?
3. According to Colossians 1:22, *why* were we reconciled to God?
4. How can we "remain in the faith, established and firm"?
5. Why did Paul rejoice? What was "lacking in the sufferings of Christ"?
6. How did Paul receive a "stewardship from God"?
7. What is "the mystery that has been kept hidden from ages and generations, but has now been revealed to his saints"?
8. How is Christ *in us*? Does He dwell within us personally?
9. Why was Paul *instructing* and *teaching* all people?
10. How did Christ work in Paul *powerfully*?

Colossians 2:1-10



1 For I want you to know how great a struggle I have for you, and for those in Laodicea, and for those who have not met me face to face. 2 My goal is that their hearts, having been knit together in love, may be encouraged, and that they may have all the riches that assurance brings in their understanding of the knowledge of the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. 4 I say this so that no one will deceive you through arguments that sound reasonable. 5 For though I am absent from you in body, I am present with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your morale and the firmness of your faith in Christ. 6 Therefore, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and firm in your faith just as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. 8 Be careful not to allow anyone to captivate you through an empty, deceitful philosophy that is according to human traditions and the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in him all the fullness of deity lives in bodily form, 10 and you have been filled in him, who is the head over every ruler and authority.

Our Religious World



Cheated By Philosophy

1. What concern did Paul have for those in Laodicea? How far away from Colosse was the city of Laodicea? What else do we know about the church in the city of Laodicea?
2. How can our hearts be “knit together in love”?
3. What is *hidden* in Christ? Please explain.
4. How are some people deceived with “arguments that sound reasonable”?
5. What does it mean to *live* in Christ?
6. How can we be “rooted and built up in him”?
7. How can we be “overflowing with thankfulness”? Why is this so lacking among many Christians?
8. How could someone take us *captive* through human philosophy?
9. What human traditions was Paul concerned about?
10. How does “all the fullness of deity” dwell in Christ “in bodily form”?



11 In him you also were circumcised—not, however, with a circumcision performed by human hands, but by the removal of the fleshly body, that is, through the circumcision done by Christ. 12 Having been buried with him in baptism, you also have been raised with him through your faith in the power of God who raised him from the dead. 13 And even though you were dead in your transgressions and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, he nevertheless made you alive with him, having forgiven all your transgressions. 14 He has destroyed what was against us, a certificate of indebtedness expressed in decrees opposed to us. He has taken it away by nailing it to the cross. 15 Disarming the rulers and authorities, he has made a public disgrace of them, triumphing over them by the cross. 16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you with respect to food or drink, or in the matter of a feast, new moon, or Sabbath days— 17 these are only the shadow of the things to come, but the reality is Christ! 18 Let no one who delights in humility and the worship of angels pass judgment on you. That person goes on at great lengths about what he has supposedly seen, but he is puffed up with empty notions by his fleshly mind. 19 He has not held fast to the head from whom the whole body, supported and knit together through its ligaments and sinews, grows with a growth that is from God. 20 If you have died with Christ to the elemental spirits of the world, why do you submit to them as though you lived in the world? 21 “Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!” 22 These are all destined to perish with use, founded as they are on human commands and teachings. 23 Even though they have the appearance of wisdom with their self-imposed worship and false humility achieved by an unsparing treatment of the body—a wisdom with no true value—they in reality result in fleshly indulgence.

Cheated By Legalism

1. What is the circumcision made without human hands?
2. Why is it so fitting to speak of baptism as a burial?
3. What is the “certificate of indebtedness expressed in decrees opposed to us”?
4. What was nailed to the cross?
5. How did Christ make “a public disgrace” of principalities and powers?
6. How could one judge you in regard to food, drink, a feast, a new moon or a sabbath?
7. How does the body of Christ grow?
8. What “human commands” had some submitted themselves to?
9. What things had an “appearance of wisdom”?
10. What is “self-imposed worship” and “false humility”?

Colossians 3:1–11



1 Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.
2 Keep thinking about things above, not things on the earth,
3 for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.
4 When Christ (who is your life) appears, then you too will be revealed in glory with him.
5 So put to death whatever in your nature belongs to the earth: sexual immorality, impurity, shameful passion, evil desire, and greed which is idolatry.
6 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming on the sons of disobedience.
7 You also lived your lives in this way at one time, when you used to live among them.
8 But now, put off all such things as anger, rage, malice, slander, abusive language from your mouth.
9 Do not lie to one another since you have put off the old man with its practices
10 and have been clothed with the new man that is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of the one who created it.
11 Here there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all and in all.



Raised With Christ

1. How were we “raised with Christ”?
2. Why is Christ “seated at the right hand of God”?
3. How do “keep thinking about things above”?
4. How do we put to death our *nature*?
5. Why is covetousness referred to as *idolatry*?
6. Who are the “sons of disobedience”?
7. List the things we are to “put off” from our life.
8. How are we *clothed* with the *new man*?
9. How is the new man to be *renewed*?
10. Who are the Scythians? Why are they mentioned here?

Colossians 3:12–17



12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with a heart of mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if someone happens to have a complaint against anyone else. Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also forgive others. 14 And to all these virtues add love, which is the perfect bond. 15 Let the peace of Christ be in control in your heart (for you were in fact called as one body to this peace), and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and exhorting one another with all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, all with grace in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.



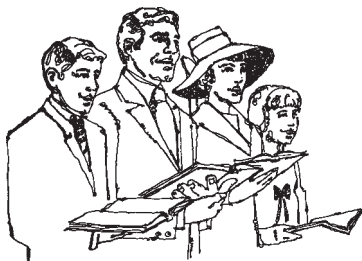
The New Man In Christ

1. How are we “the elect of God”?
2. What characteristics are we to *clothe* ourselves with?
3. In what manner are we to forgive one another?
4. How is love the “perfect bond”?
5. How can we let the “peace of Christ be in control in your heart”?
6. What is the “one body” spoken of in Colossians 3:15?
7. How can “the word of Christ dwell” in us?
8. What is the difference between *psalms*, *hymns* and *spiritual songs*?
9. How can we do “all in the name of the Lord”?
10. How do we give thanks to God the Father through Christ?

Colossians 3:18–4:6



18 Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be embittered against them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing in the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not provoke your children, so they will not become disheartened. 22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in every respect, not only when they are watching—like those who are strictly people-pleasers—but with a sincere heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you are doing, work at it with enthusiasm, as to the Lord and not for people, 24 because you know that you will receive your inheritance from the Lord as the reward. Serve the Lord Christ. 25 For the one who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there are no exceptions. 4:1 Masters, treat your slaves with justice and fairness, because you know that you also have a master in heaven. 2 Be devoted to prayer, keeping alert in it with thanksgiving. 3 At the same time pray for us too, that God may open a door for the message so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may make it known as I should. 5 Conduct yourselves with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunities. 6 Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer everyone.



Proper Roles

1. In what way are wives to *submit* to their husbands?
2. In what way are husbands to *love* their wives?
3. Are there any limits on how children must obey their parents?
4. How can fathers *provoke* their children?
5. How are servants to work for their masters?
6. How are masters to treat their servants?
7. How can God “open a door for the message”?
8. How do we conduct ourselves with wisdom toward outsiders?
9. How can we make the most of our opportunities?
10. Why is our speech to be “gracious, seasoned with salt”?

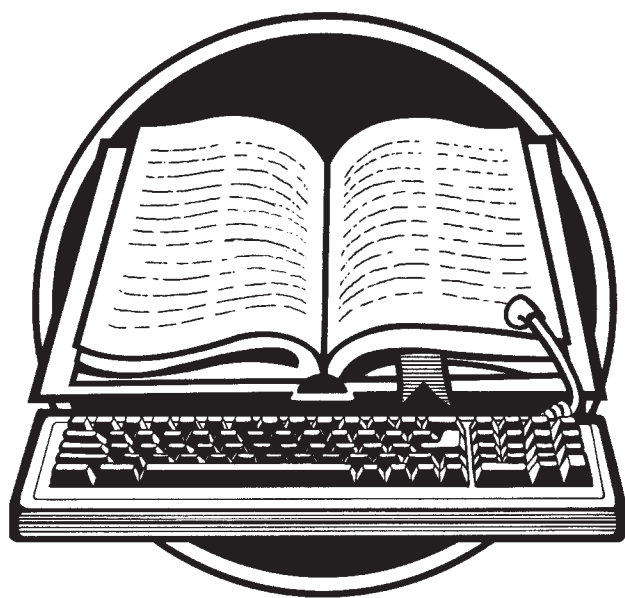
Colossians 4:7–18



7 Tychicus, a dear brother, faithful minister, and fellow slave in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. 8 I sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are doing and that he may encourage your hearts. 9 I sent him with Onesimus, the faithful and dear brother, who is one of you. They will tell you about everything here. 10 Aristarchus, my fellow prisoner, sends you greetings, as does Mark, the cousin of Barnabas (about whom you received instructions; if he comes to you, welcome him). 11 And Jesus who is called Justus also sends greetings. In terms of Jewish converts, these are the only fellow workers for the kingdom of God, and they have been a comfort to me. 12 Epaphras, who is one of you and a slave of Christ, greets you. He is always struggling in prayer on your behalf, so that you may stand mature and fully assured in all the will of God. 13 For I can testify that he has worked hard for you and for those in Laodicea and Hierapolis. 14 Our dear friend Luke the physician and Demas greet you. 15 Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters who are in Laodicea and to Nympha and the church that meets in her house. 16 And after you have read this letter, have it read to the church of Laodicea. In turn, read the letter from Laodicea as well. 17 And tell Archippus, "See to it that you complete the ministry you received in the Lord." 18 I, Paul, write this greeting by my own hand. Remember my chains. Grace be with you.

Greetings And Exhortations

1. Who is Tychicus? What was he going to do for the brethren?
2. Who is Onesimus? What do we know about him?
3. Who is Aristarchus? What do we know about him?
4. What do we know about Mark, the cousin of Barnabas?
5. What is said about Epaphras?
6. Where is Hierapolis? How close is it to Laodicea and Colosse?
7. How is Luke described in this passage?
8. What were the Colossians to do with the letter Paul sent them?
9. What were the brethren to tell Archippus?
10. What were the brethren to remember about Paul?



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